Conf
Pam
12mo
#735
c. 1

Duke University Libraries
Message of the
Conf Pam 12mo #735
D990669837

C638

SECRET.]

SENATE, MARCH 13, 1865.—Read and ordered to be printed.

MESSAGE OF THE PRESIDENT.

To the Senate and House of Representatives
of the Confederate States of America:

When informed on Thursday last that it was the intention of Congress to adjourn sine die on the ensuing Saturday, I deemed it my duty to request a postponement of the adjournment, in order that I might submit for your consideration certain matters of public interest, which are now laid before you. When that request was made, the most important measures that had occupied your attention during the session had not been so far advanced as to be submitted for executive action; and the state of the country had been so materially affected by the events of the last four months as to evince the necessity of further and more energetic legislation than was contemplated in November last.

Our country is now environed with perils which it is our duty calmly to contemplate. Thus alone can the measures necessary to avert threatened calamities be wisely devised and efficiently enforced

Recent military operations of the enemy have been successful in the capture of some of our seaports, in interrupting some of our lines of communication, and in devastating large districts of our country. These events have had the natural effect of encouraging our foes and dispiriting many of our people. The Capital of the Confederate States is now threatened, and is in greater danger than it has heretofore been during the war.

The fact is stated, without reserve or concealment, as due to the people whose servants we are, and in whose courage and constancy entire trust is reposed; as due to you, in whose wisdom and resolute spirit the people have confided, for the adoption of the measures required to guard them from threatened perils.

While stating to you that our country is in danger, I desire also to state my deliberate conviction that it is within our power to avert the calamities which menace us, and to secure the triumph of the sacred cause for which so much sacrifice has been made; so much suffering endured; so many precious lives been lost. This result is to be obtained by fortitude, by courage, by constancy in enduring the sacrifices still needed: in a word, by the prompt and resolute devotion of the whole resources of men and money in the Confederacy to the achievement of our liberties and independence. The measures now required, to be successful, should be prompt. Long deliberation and protracted debate over important measures are not only natural,

but laudable in representative assemblies, under ordinary circumstances; but in moments of danger, when action becomes urgent, the delay thus caused is itself a new source of peril. Thus it has unfortunately happened, that some of the measures passed by you in pursuance of the recommendations contained in my message of November last, have been so retarded as to lose much of their value, or have for the same reason been abandoned after being matured, because no longer applicable to our altered condition; and others have not been brought under examination. In making these remarks, it is far from my intention to attribute the loss of time to any other cause than those inherent in deliberative assemblies, but only urgently to recommend prompt action upon the measures now submitted.

We need, for carrying on the war successfully, men, and supplies for the army. We have both within our country sufficient to obtain success.

To obtain the supplies, it is necessary to protect productive districts, and guard our lines of communication, by an increase in the number of our forces; and hence its results, that with a large augmentation in the number of men in the army, the facility of supplying the troops would be greater than with our present reduced strength.

For the purchase of the supplies now required, especially for the armies in Virginia and North Carolina, the Treasury must be provided with means; and a modification in the impressment law is required. It has been ascertained by examination that we have within our reach a sufficiency of what is most needed for the army, without having recourse to the ample provision existing in those parts of the Confederacy with which our communication has been partially interrupted by hostile operations. But in some districts, from which supplies are to be drawn, the inhabitants being either within the enemy's lines, or in very close proximity, are unable to make use of Confederate treasury notes for the purchase of articles of prime necessity, and it is necessary that to some extent coin be paid, in order to obtain supplies. It is therefore recommended that Congress devise the means for making available the coin within the Confederacy, for the purpose of supplying the army. The officers of the supply departments report that with two millions of dollars in coin, the armies in Virginia and North Carolina can be amply supplied for the remainder of the year; and the knowledge of this fact should suffice to insure the adoption of the measures necessary to obtain this moderate sum.

The impressment law, as it now exists, prohibits the public officers from impressing supplies, without making payment of the valuation at the time of impressment. The limit fixed for the issue of treasury notes has been nearly reached, and the Treasury cannot always furnish the funds necessary for prompt payment; while the law for raising revenue, which would have afforded means for diminishing if not removing this difficulty, was unfortunately delayed for several months, and has just been signed. In this condition of things, it is impossible to supply the army, although ample stores may exist in

the country, whenever the owners refuse to give credit to the public officer. It is necessary that this restriction on the power of impressment be removed. The power is admitted to be objectionable, liable to abuse, and unequal in its operations on individuals. Yet all these objections must yield to absolute necessity. It is also suggested that the system of valuation now established ought to be radically changed. The legislation requires, in such cases of impressment, that the market price be paid; but there is really no market price in many cases, and the valuation is made arbitrarily and in a depreciated currency. The result is that the most extravagant prices are fixed, such as no one expects ever to be paid in coin. None believe that the government can ever redeem in coin the obligation to pay fifty dollars a bushel for corn, or seven hundred dollars a barrel for flour. It would seem to be more just and appropriate to estimate the supplies impressed at their value in coin, to give the obligation of the government for the payment of the price in coin, with reasonable interest, or at the option of the creditor, to return in kind the wheat or corn impressed, with a reasonable interest, also payable in kind, and to make the obligations thus issued receivable for all payments due in coin to the government. Whatever be the value attached by Congress to these suggestions, it is hoped that there will be no hesitation in so changing the law as to render it possible to supply the army, in case of necessity for the impressment of provisions for that purpose.

The measure adopted to raise revenue, though liberal in its provisions, being clearly inadequate to meet the arrear of debt and the current expenditure, some degree of embarrassment in the management of the finances must continue to be felt. It is to be regretted, I think, that the recommendation of the Secretary of the Treasury, of a tax on agricultural income, equal to the augmented tax on other incomes, payable in treasury notes, was rejected by Congress. This tax would have contributed materially to facilitate the purchase of provisions, and diminish the necessity that is now felt for a supply of coin.

The measures passed by Congress during the session for recruiting the army and supplying the additional force needed for the public defence, have been in my judgment insufficient, and I am impelled by a profound conviction of duty, and stimulated by a sense of the perils which surround our country, to urge upon you additional legislation on this subject.

The bill for employing negroes as soldiers has not yet reached me, though the printed journals of your proceedings inform me of its passage. Much benefit is anticipated from this measure, though far less than would have resulted from its adoption at an earlier date, so as to afford time for their organization and instruction during the winter months.

The bill for diminishing the number of exempts has just been made the subject of a special message, and its provisions are such as would add no strength to the army. The recommendation to abolish all class exemptions has not met your favor, although still deemed

by me a valuable and important measure; and the number of men exempted by a new clause in the act just passed is believed to be quite equal to that of those whose exemption is revoked. A law of a few lines repealing all class exemptions would not only strengthen the forces in the field, but be still more beneficial, by abating the natural discontent and jealousy created in the army by the existence of classes privileged by law to remain in places of safety, while their fellow-citizens are exposed in the trenches and the field.

The measure most needed, however, at the present time for affording an effective increase to our military strength, is a general militia law, such as the constitution authorizes Congress to pass, by granting to it power "to provide for organizing, arming and disciplining the militia, and for governing such part of them as may be employed in the service of the Confederate States;" and the further power "to provide for calling forth the militia to execute the laws of the Confederate States, suppress insurrections and repel invasions." The necessity for the exercise of this power can never exist, if not in the circumstances which now surround us.

The security of the States against any encroachment by the Confederate government is amply provided by the constitution, by "reserving to the States, respectively, the appointment of the officers, and the authority of training the militia, according to the discipline prescribed by Congress."

A law is needed to prescribe not only how and of what persons the militia are to be organized, but to provide the mode of calling them out. If instances be required to show the necessity for such general law, it is sufficient to mention, that in one case I have been informed by the Governor of a State, that the law does not permit him to call the militia from one county for service in another, so that a single brigade of the enemy could traverse the State, and devastate each county in turn, without any power on the part of the Executive to use the militia for effective defence; while in another State the Executive refused to allow the militia "to be employed in the service of the Confederate States," in the absence of a law for that purpose.

I have heretofore, in a confidential message to the two Houses, stated the facts which induced me to consider it necessary that the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus should be suspended. The conviction of the necessity of this measure has become deeper as the events of the struggle have been developed. Congress has not concurred with me in opinion. It is my duty to say that the time has arrived when the suspension of the writ is not simply advisable and expedient, but almost indispensable to the successful conduct of the war. On Congress must rest the responsibility of declining to exercise a power conferred by the constitution as a means of public safety, to be used in periods of national peril resulting from foreign invasion. If our present circumstances are not such as were contemplated when this power was conferred, I confess myself at a loss to imagine any contingency in which this clause of the constitution will not remain a dead letter.

With the prompt adoption of the measures above recommended, and the united and hearty co-operation of Congress and the people in the execution of the laws and the defence of the country, we may enter upon the present campaign with cheerful confidence in the result. And who can doubt the continued existence of that spirit and fortitude in the people, and of that constancy under reverses, which alone are needed to render our triumph secure? What other resource remains available but the undying, unconquerable resolve to be free?

It has become certain, beyond all doubt or question, that we must continue this struggle to a successful issue, or must make abject and unconditional submission to such terms as it shall please the conqueror to impose on us, after our surrender. If a possible doubt could exist, after the conference between our commissioners and Mr. Lincoln, as recently reported to you, it would be dispelled by a recent occurrence, of which it is proper that you should be informed.

Congress will remember that in the conference above referred to, our commissioners were informed that the government of the United States would not enter into any agreement or treaty whatever with the Confederate States, nor with any single State: that the only possible mode of obtaining peace was by laying down our arms, disbanding our forces, and yielding unconditional obedience to the laws of the United States, including those passed for the confiscation of our property, and the constitutional amendment for the abolition of slavery. It will further be remembered that Mr. Lincoln declared that the only terms on which hostilities could cease, were those stated in his message of December last, in which we were informed that in the event of our penitent submission, he would temper justice with mercy, and that the question whether we would be governed as dependent territories, or permitted to have a representation in their Congress, was one on which he could promise nothing, but which would be decided by their Congress, after our submission had been accepted.

It has not, however, been hitherto stated to you, that in the course of the conference at Fortress Monroe, a suggestion was made by one of our Commissioners that the objection entertained by Mr. Lincoln to treating with the government of the Confederacy, or with any separate State, might be avoided, by substituting for the usual mode of negotiating through Commissioners or other diplomatic agents, the method sometimes employed, of a military convention, to be entered into by the Commanding Generals of the armies of the two belligerents. This he admitted was a power possessed by him, though it was not thought commensurate with all the questions involved. As he did not accept the suggestion when made, he was afterwards requested to reconsider his conclusion upon the subject of a suspension of hostilities, which he agreed to do, but said that he had maturely considered of the plan, and had determined that it could not be done.

Subsequently, however, an interview with General Longstreet was asked for by General Ord, commanding the enemy's army of the James, during which General Longstreet was informed by him that

there was a possibility of arriving at a satisfactory adjustment of the present unhappy difficulties, by means of a military convention; and that if General Lee desired an interview on the subject, it would not be declined, provided General Lee had authority to act. This communication was supposed to be the consequence of the suggestion above referred to, and General Lee, according to instructions, wrote to General Grant on the second of this month, proposing to meet him for conference on the subject, and stating that he was vested with the requisite authority. General Grant's reply stated that he had no authority to accede to the proposed conference; that his power extended only to making a convention on subjects purely of a military character, and that General Ord could only have meant that an interview would not be refused on any subject on which he (General Grant) had the right to act.

It thus appears that neither with the Confederate authorities nor the authorities of any State, nor through the Commanding Generals, will the Government of the United States treat or make any terms or agreement whatever for the cessation of hostilities. There remains then for us no choice but to continue the contest to a final issue—for the people of the Confederacy can be but little known to him who supposes it possible they would ever consent to purchase, at the cost of degradation and slavery, permission to live in a country garrisoned by their own negroes, and governed by officers sent by the conqueror to rule over them.

Having thus fully placed before you the information requisite to enable you to judge of the state of the country, the dangers to which we are exposed, and the measures of legislation needed for averting them, it remains for me but to invoke your attention to the consideration of those means by which, above all others, we may hope to escape the calamities that would result from our failure. Prominent above all others is the necessity for earnest and cordial cooperation between all departments of government, State and Confederate, and all eminent citizens throughout the Confederacy. To you especially, as Senators and Representatives, do the people look for encouragement and counsel. To your action, not only in legislative halls, but in your homes, will their eyes be turned for the example of what is befitting men who, by willing sacrifices on the altar of freedom, show that they are worthy to enjoy its blessings. I feel full confidence that you will concur with me in the conviction that your public duties will not be ended when you shall have closed the legislative labors of the session, but that your voice will be heard, cheering and encouraging the people to that persistent fortitude which they have hitherto displayed, and animating them by the manifestation of that serene confidence which in moments of public danger is the distinctive characteristic of the patriot who derives courage from his devotion to his country's destiny, and is thus enabled to inspire the like courage in others.

Thus united in a common and holy cause, rising above all selfish considerations, rendering all our means and faculties tributary to the

country's welfare, let us bow submissively to the divine will, and reverently invoke the blessing of our Heavenly Father, that as he protected and guided our sires when struggling in a similar cause, so he will enable us to guard safely our altars and our firesides, and maintain inviolate the political rights which we inherited.

JEFFERSON DAVIS.

Richmond, Va., March 13, 1865.

Permalife®
pH 8.5